




## Challenges for Research into Military Investigations

Antje Buehler<sup>a</sup>, Gavin E. Oxburgh<sup>b</sup>, Peter Zimmermann<sup>a</sup>, Gerd-Dieter Willmund<sup>a</sup> and Ulrich Wesemann<sup>a</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Centre for Military Mental Health (CMMH), Military Hospital Berlin, Berlin, Germany; <sup>b</sup>School of Psychology, Newcastle University, Newcastle, UK

In cases of suspected violations of rules, regulations or the law by armed forces personnel, investigations are invariably mandatory. Military investigations differ from well-researched civilian criminal investigations. Differing from civilian police detectives, most military investigators – as disciplinary supervisors and military police personnel – have a number of tasks to accomplish, which include leading in combat and ensuring military readiness. Military investigations can lead to substantive negative or positive consequences for military readiness, including mental health, unit cohesion and subjective legal certainty. This impact on unit cohesion and mental health is influenced by any prior history of distress or trauma; military investigations are often preceded by contravention of internal disciplinary acts, complaints and traumatic events. This study explores factors in the differing military and legal systems of Germany and the United Kingdom (UK) that might help military personnel to successfully conduct investigations while ensuring deployment readiness and maintaining human rights.

**Keywords:** human rights; investigations; meaningfulness; mental health; military personnel; unit cohesion; vulnerability.

### Introduction

In most countries, armed forces personnel are not only subject to civilian law but also to the military law relevant to the branch of which they are a member. However, military investigations differ from civilian criminal investigations in a number of aspects. Investigations in a military context are often more complex and involve additional ‘investigation’ personnel, many of whom do not necessarily deal with investigations as a primary task. In cases of suspected disciplinary misconduct, the initial investigation is usually performed by the immediate disciplinary superior officers in the suspect’s own unit. Such cases may also be

referred to the military supervisors of the immediate disciplinary officer, the relevant military police officers (depending on the nature of the offence) and/or legal experts in the armed forces. In cases of suspected criminal acts, military police – and probably legal advisers – are usually called upon to lead the investigation (or at least advise on it), and, occasionally, joint military and civilian police criminal investigations may also be carried out (depending on the nature of the offence).

### Research on Military Investigations

There is a dearth of academic research on the unique factors that influence and impact upon

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Correspondence: Antje Buehler, Military Hospital Berlin, Centre for Military Mental Health (CMMH), Scharnhorststr. 13, 10115 Berlin, Germany. Email: [anb@ptzbw.org](mailto:anb@ptzbw.org) [antjeheikebuehler@bundeswehr.org](mailto:antjeheikebuehler@bundeswehr.org)

military investigations, including the psychological well-being and mental health of the service personnel involved. Very little is currently known about the factors which can help armed forces personnel to deal with the complexities of both disciplinary and criminal investigations and the potential links between the investigative processes, while the protective factor of cohesion within the military unit (i.e. camaraderie) has never been examined. As a consequence, it is necessary to rely on studies which were conducted on civilian police investigations and clinical psychology. Such a topic has to be examined theoretically and empirically if the results are to be transferred to a military context, and the unique features of the military sector have to be taken into account. Based on this theoretical analysis, relevant factors impacting on the relationship between investigations and deployment readiness should be examined and crystallized. Such factors include vulnerability per se (i.e. mental health, learning disabilities and difficulties) and the perception of the investigative process (e.g. perceived fairness, perceived impartiality, humane interview style), which may impact on deployment readiness and the quality of the information obtained, as well as on the right of individuals to receive a fair and ethical investigation.

### ***Unique Features and Complexities of Military Investigations***

In contrast to investigators within civilian police forces, investigations are not the primary task of military disciplinary officers and supervisors. Officers are responsible for leading their military units in combat and for ensuring military discipline, unit cohesion, and the physical and mental fitness of their personnel. These different responsibilities have implications for the time and resources available for training officers in investigative processes. In addition, disciplinary supervisors are challenged with handling and reconciling competing tasks and potentially conflicting interests. For example, if a disciplinary officer or supervisor investigates a matter in his or her own unit, the investigation is taking place

in an environment of high social interdependence, not only between interviewer(s) and interviewee(s) but also between alleged suspects, victims and witnesses, all of whom may be comrades and/or family members in the same unit. The social support of one's comrades and military supervisors (also called unit cohesion) is a central – perhaps paramount – motivating factor for deployment, as well as being an important protective factor for the mental health of military personnel.

### ***Military Systems Around the Globe***

Armed forces throughout the world have strong, long-standing relationships with each other, and many are members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), which was established in 1949 following the end of the Second World War. Military police structures, mandates and tasks differ between the various forces due to their histories. This article, whilst outlining some key differences between civilian and military investigative processes, primarily focuses upon the German and United Kingdom (UK) militaries, given the countries' strong alliance but strikingly different deployment stances. For example, whilst UK forces have been (and continue to be) deployed in war zones around the world, until the end of the East–West conflict and the German reunification, the mission of the Bundeswehr (the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Germany [FRG]) was restricted to the defence of the FRG and its partners in the NATO alliance, which was reflected in Article 87a of the basic law of the German constitution. When Germany was reunified at the end of the 1980s, their military missions changed substantively. Whilst the German armed forces were deployed on humanitarian missions not long after their establishment in 1955 (e.g. after the earthquake in Morocco in 1960), the new peacekeeping and peacebuilding tasks involved initially controversial armed deployments. On 12 July 1994, the German Federal Constitutional Court made the following ruling: 'Armed deployments of the Bundeswehr in a framework of

“systems of collective security” as The United Nations or NATO are permissible/legal. They require the prior approval by the German parliament (Bundestag)’. Retrieved from [https://www.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/bwde/start/streitkraefte/grundlagen/geschichte/umbruch!/ut/p/z1/hU5NC4IwGP4tHbzufVM062anFCFBId0llq5pTCdzaT8\\_w1OQ9NyeTx6gkAPt2NgIZhrVMTnzgnrXox9nsb23bdfzEcNtlpzCyLXRd-DyL0BnG1cQIKQVh2Le2K1unD1IgQJ9sJG9SK-0kdwQVn4eQIGzrpI8UWWwCBFQIdVtuR50N8cXQDW\\_dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/#Z7-B8LTL292256800I1TPHIJ52006](https://www.bundeswehr.de/portal/a/bwde/start/streitkraefte/grundlagen/geschichte/umbruch!/ut/p/z1/hU5NC4IwGP4tHbzufVM062anFCFBId0llq5pTCdzaT8_w1OQ9NyeTx6gkAPt2NgIZhrVMTnzgnrXox9nsb23bdfzEcNtlpzCyLXRd-DyL0BnG1cQIKQVh2Le2K1unD1IgQJ9sJG9SK-0kdwQVn4eQIGzrpI8UWWwCBFQIdVtuR50N8cXQDW_dz/d5/L2dBISEvZ0FBIS9nQSEh/#Z7-B8LTL292256800I1TPHIJ52006)

Despite both countries fighting against each other in two world wars, the UK and Germany became close allies in 1949. Since then, UK personnel from the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the British Army (BA) have been stationed across Germany (including the former East Germany), and the two countries have built and maintained exceptionally strong personal and professional alliances ever since.

Given the strong alliances across NATO forces (and within Europe), together with the nations’ continual joint operations and deployments, it is more important than ever to ensure that the different systems (legal and disciplinary) used across different military organizations are consistent and adhere to international human rights. The Standardization Agreement 2296, the ‘Allied Joint Doctrine for Military Police’, defines the scope of military police support in multi-national deployments and the role of provost marshals as military police advisers for commanders. Apart from deployments abroad, a number of NATO frameworks have been established for ensuring cooperation between the different national military police structures, which include the Allied Command Operations, the Allied Command Transformation, the NATO Military Police Centre of Excellence, the NATO Stability Policing Centre of Excellence, the Joint Forces Commands and the HQ of the European Gendarmerie Force (Kommando Feldjäger der Bundeswehr, 2015).

Apart from the language differences in language-sensitive investigations, challenges for

the standardization of investigations include the differences in the legal systems; Anglo-American countries operate under a common law adversarial system, whereas Germany – along with most other countries in continental Europe – operates under a civil law inquisitorial system. These do not only include the development and interpretation of laws but also differences in structures, like the different roles of the prosecution, the police and juries.

### The Military in Germany and the UK

There are many more laws, regulations and rules involved in military investigations than civilian ones. In Germany, these include complaint procedures and military disciplinary law (*Wehrdisziplinarordnung*), military criminal law (*Wehrstrafgesetz*), criminal law (*Strafgesetz*), criminal procedural law (*Strafprozessordnung*), laws on the soldiers’ involvement (*Soldatenbeteiligungsgesetz*), the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act (*Soldatengesetz*) and administrative procedural law (*Verwaltungsverfahrensgesetz*). Some laws also have different objectives – for example, in contrast to criminal law, military disciplinary law has educational objectives and therefore includes positive and negative disciplinary measures. An example of a positive disciplinary measure could be a formal recognition of outstanding performance (*förmliche Anerkennung*) involving up to 14 days of extraordinary holidays. Negative disciplinary measures include simple disciplinary measures decided upon by the disciplinary supervising military officer (e.g. a reprimand, restricted leave from the military installation, disciplinary arrests of between three days and three weeks) and judicial disciplinary measures decided in a trial by the *Truppendienstgericht* (e.g. reduction in salary, denial of a promotion for between one and four years, demotion in rank, discharge from service, reduction or removal of pension). The *Truppendienstgerichte* form part of the judiciary of the German ministry of defence; they

are courts which decide upon complaints made by military personnel and alleged disciplinary transgressions.

In Germany, the military police are part of the support services (*Streitkräftebasis*) with a one-star command and three regiments; they are responsible for all military personnel in the German armed forces. When the German military police force was established in 1955, its mandate did not include criminal investigations and prosecutions – thus, there are no German military courts, so when soldiers are accused of criminal offences their cases fall under the jurisdiction of the civilian courts. Under specific circumstances as defined by the German constitution (Art. 96 Absatz 2 Satz 2 GG), temporary military courts can be established, however, this has not been enacted to date.

Most of the investigations into suspected disciplinary transgressions and complaints by soldiers remain with a military disciplinary officer, who can carry out the investigation himself or request the assistance of a disciplinary officer from the military police, either to carry out the investigation completely or to provide personnel to support the investigation. German military police officers are not allowed to carry out preliminary investigations without the submission of a request.

During mandated missions abroad, the German civilian prosecution is in charge, both when German military personnel are alleged to have committed criminal acts and when alleged criminal acts have been perpetrated against German military personnel (the Federal Prosecutor General of the Federal Court of Justice [120, 142aGVG], the prosecution in the town of Kempten or a place of jurisdiction yet to be defined [11a StPO]). International law does not allow the German prosecution to investigate outside Germany (Stamm, 2010). In these cases, the legal staff officer is tasked with liaising with the German prosecution and the German Courts of Military Service (*Wehrdisziplinargerichte*). On request from the German contingent's

commander, the legal staff officer supports the commander in the case of suspected criminal acts and disciplinary transgressions on the part of deployed military personnel. Upon request, the German provost marshal – the highest leader in the military police of the respective contingent – can support the German legal staff officer in the investigation (Heinen, 2013).

In the UK, the term 'military police' refers to three branches of the service police, each of which is responsible for policing its own force: the Royal Military Police (RMP), the Royal Air Force Police (RAFP) and the Royal Navy Police (RNP). The service police comply with the Armed Forces Act (2006/2011) and the Service Police Codes of Practice (SPCP), issued by the UK secretary of state under the civilian police legislation known as the Police and Criminal Evidence Act (PACE) Act (1984). The SPCP is based upon the PACE Act (1984) and regulates service police powers and procedures in the investigation of offences, ensuring that safeguards are protected for members of the service community. The BA is policed by the RMP; however, the enforcement of basic discipline within regiments is normally carried out by the regimental provost.<sup>1</sup> The RAFP is responsible for the policing of RAF personnel (and their families if overseas), along with specialist security roles such as physical security, cybersecurity and information security. RNP officers are traditionally referred to as 'regulators' (or 'masters-at-arms' if they are chief petty officers or warrant officers). The RNP also incorporates royal marines who specialize as service police officers. Prior to 2009, the Royal Marines Police was an independent organization within the Corps of Royal Marines. Each branch of the service police also has specially trained detectives that form part of their respective special investigations branch (SIB); these officers are responsible for the investigation of more serious crimes and usually wear plain clothes rather than a uniform.

### **Vulnerability Within the Armed Forces** ***The Mental Health of Military Personnel*** ***in Germany and the UK***

Previous epidemiological studies on military mental health have focused on comparing prevalence and incidence rates for military and civilian populations and the impact of military deployment (Hines, Sundin, Rona, Wessely & Fear, 2014; Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cotting & Koffman, 2008). Studies conducted on United States (US) and UK populations suggest an overall higher prevalence of mental disorders in their military personnel compared to a matched civilian population, whereas the results for German military personnel do not show this general trend (Hines, Sundin, Rona, Wessely & Fear, 2014; Hoge, Castro, Messer, McGurk, Cotting & Koffman, 2008; Trautmann, Goodwin, Hofler, Jacobi, Strehle, Zimmermann & Wittchen, 2017). Within the UK's armed forces, the prevalence of common mental health problems in the military is higher than in the general population, but remains stable (POST, 2016). Depression, anxiety and alcohol abuse appear to be more common than post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and across the whole of the UK's armed forces its prevalence is around 4% (KCMHR, 2014). With that said, following the Iraq and Afghanistan conflicts, the personnel deployed in combat roles reported a higher prevalence of PTSD than those deployed in other roles (6.9% compared to 3.6%; KCMHR, 2014).

By contrast, lower 12-month prevalence and severity of mental disorders were found in non-deployed military personnel in the German armed forces (14.4%) than in a matched German civilian population (20.0%; Trautmann et al., 2017). Overall prevalence and severity was not found to differ significantly between deployed military personnel (16.6%) and the civilian population. In respect to individual diagnoses of alcohol and nicotine dependence, lower prevalence and severity were found in both military samples. However, panic/agoraphobia and PTSD were

found to be more prevalent in deployed soldiers with high combat exposure than in civilians.

Transferring the results of civilian-based research on PTSD to the military sector is problematic due to the high-risk missions of armed forces personnel: 'The traumatic event is expected, prepared for, and even sometimes sought after as an opportunity to test one's skills and perform an important service to others' (Adler & Castro, 2013, p. 47). In the civilian sector, according to the individual-oriented disease model, traumatic events are considered to be unwanted and unexpected (Adler & Castro, 2013).

In terms of the disciplinary and criminal investigative processes, a general distinction between perpetrator and victim – as is customary in clinical psycho-trauma research – also proves difficult, because in military-specific traumatic incidents service personnel can suffer from violence as well as harm their opponents. For example, a military guard protecting a checkpoint ensuring the regional population's security could be (allegedly) attacked from an approaching vehicle. In this role, the guard is the victim. At the same time, however, by fulfilling his or her duty and returning fire, the result could be the deaths of combatants (and potentially civilians). In this case, the soldier can become a suspect in a following investigation.

### ***Learning Disabilities and Difficulties***

When it comes to delivering justice, vulnerability is a key issue for all concerned, whether military or civilian, and must not be overlooked. The human rights of all those involved in military investigations, like their civilian counterparts, must be maintained to the highest standards – especially given that service personnel act as state representatives when on overseas deployment. At present, anyone with a physical disability is barred from joining the armed forces – and this is certainly the case in the UK and Germany. However, what about those who have a learning disability or

difficulty? At present, individuals with a moderate learning difficulty (e.g. dyslexia or dyscalculia) can join the German and UK armed forces under the condition that they pass a series of specific entry tests. However, someone with a neuro-developmental disorder (e.g. autism) is not eligible to join. Clearly, if personnel have a condition when they join or are diagnosed whilst serving, it may not be apparent to the disciplinary or investigating officer – yet safeguards should be put in place to protect them.

For civilian police investigations in the UK, registered intermediaries are used who, rather than being expert witnesses, are communication experts accredited by the Ministry of Justice to assist with communication between police officers, lawyers and vulnerable persons during police investigations and attendance at court.

By comparison, Germany has implemented Directive 2012/29/EU of the European Parliament and the Council of Europe of 25 October 2012 establishing minimum standards on the rights, support and protection of victims of crime. In January 2017, a new law on the offering of psychosocial assistance to vulnerable victims of crime before, during and after the main trial (court hearings) entered into force (*Psychosoziale Prozessbegleitung*, *PsychPbG*, see also 406g stop). This non-legal form of assistance includes the provision of information and qualified support services during the whole legal process. It is directed towards reducing the individual burden of the victim and avoiding secondary victimization. However, any interview is always carried out by either the investigating police officer, the prosecutor or the judge.

### ***International Human Rights and Military Readiness***

The accountability of state representatives (e.g. service personnel) is of special importance for ensuring human rights and maintaining law and order. Human rights violations are acts of commission or omission by state

representatives that fail to respect, protect and fulfil such rights. If members of the armed forces (as state representatives) are suspected of having violated a rule or a law, an investigation – including subsequent investigative interviews – is mandatory. At the same time, interviews within the armed forces can affect military and deployment readiness, which depend – to a large degree – on the mental health, military-specific social support (unit cohesion) and subjective legal certainty of the personnel involved (Adler & Castro, 2013; Brailey, Vasterling, Proctor, Constans, & Friedman, 2007; Pietsch, 2012; Wolfe et al., 1998). Such investigations can have an impact on all of these factors.

The investigative process (including the interviews) can be a stressful experience for all concerned, and in the armed forces such investigations and interviews are often preceded by stressful incidents, including internal disciplinary misconduct, complaints and traumatic events at home or during a deployment abroad. In cases of suspected disciplinary misconduct, the initial investigation is usually performed by the immediate disciplinary superior in the suspect's own unit. At the same time, the disciplinary superior is responsible for the health (including the mental health) and fitness for duty of his or her subordinates; in Germany, this is covered under Section 10(3) of the Legal Status of Military Personnel Act (*Soldatengesetz*). When a superior investigates alleged misconduct in his or her own military unit, German military witnesses are obliged to tell the truth, regardless of whether this involves giving exonerating or incriminating evidence about their comrades. Investigations in a highly interdependent social network such as a military unit can, therefore, affect unit cohesion. The impact of the perceived fairness of investigations and their outcome on deployment readiness is reflected by Pietsch (2012), who states that 'legal uncertainty' is the third most common reason cited by service personnel for refusing to participate again in a deployment abroad.



However, research on investigative interviewing techniques also suggests a high chance of a win-win situation for ensuring human rights and military readiness. If investigative interviews are carried out professionally, they might even ensure mission readiness by impacting positively on all three relevant factors: mental health, unit cohesion and subjective/perceived legal certainty. Various studies have found that the successful maintenance of rapport-building using a humanitarian interview style facilitates both preferable interview outcomes (Alison, Alison, Noone, Elntib, & Christiansen, 2013; Alison et al., 2014; G. E. Oxburgh & Ost, 2011; Russano, Narchet, Kleinman, & Meissner, 2014; Walsh & Bull, 2012) and positive mental health (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Madsen & Holmberg, 2015).

### **The Investigative Process: Investigative Interviews and Mental Health**

Much of the current research in this area focuses on the PTSD symptoms of alleged victims following investigations (Erez et al., 1997; Goodrum, 2007; Hermann, 2005; Orth, 2004, 2009; Orth & Maercker, 2004; Parsons & Bergin, 2010), in particular, female victims of sexual assault (Campbell & Raja, 1999; Campbell, Wasco, Ahrens, Seftl, & Barnes, 2001; Cluss, Boughton, Frank, Stewart, & West, 1983; Frazier & Haney, 1996; Holmström & Burgess, 1978; Sales, Baum, & Shore, 1984). The mental health and well-being of witnesses and suspects is less well studied (but see L. Oxburgh, Gabbert, Milne, & Cherryman, 2016). Findings on the relationship between criminal procedures and worsening PTSD symptoms are inconsistent (Campbell et al., 2001; Campbell & Raja, 1999; Cluss et al., 1983; Frazier & Haney, 1996; Goodrum, 2007; Hermann, 2005; Holmström & Burgess, 1978; Orth & Maercker, 2004; Sales et al., 1984; Wagner, Boucsein, & Maercker, 2011; Wemmers, 2013), and the various studies differ significantly in terms of methodology, the

influencing factors and the legal process examined (e.g. investigative interviews by police officers, trials at court). At this point, scientific evidence of the factors that impact on PTSD severity is limited even in the field of civilian criminal justice, although studies hint at the importance of several factors for mental stabilization following traumatic events, including perceived fairness (particularly procedural fairness: ‘experiencing voice’, ‘empathic feedback’, ‘respect’; see Guthrey, 2015; Wemmers, 2013), social support, social acknowledgment, understanding the purpose and goals of the legal procedures and having an impact on the outcome (e.g. Guthrey, 2015; Wagner, Keller, Knaevelsrud, & Maercker, 2012).

Even in the absence of traumatic events, investigative interviews can influence the mental health status of interviewees. It has been found that biased assumptions about guilt lead not only to inaccurate interview results due to ‘confirmation biases’ (e.g. Hill, Memon, & McGeorge, 2008; Kassir, 2005; Kassir, Goldstein, & Savitsky, 2003) but also to heightened stress reactions which may include insomnia in both guilty and innocent individuals (Guyll et al., 2013; Holmberg & Christianson, 2002). Thus, impartiality in investigative interviews seems to be one of the most important factors impacting on the relationship with mental health, as well as on comprehensive information-gathering.

Although investigative interviews can be stressful due to perceived uncertainty, stress is not necessarily harmful and does not, in itself, lead to mental health conditions and decreased quality of life. Research has shown that coping with critical life events is mediated and predicted by a sense of coherence (Antonovsky, 1993; Julkunen & Ahlström, 2006; Motzer & Stewart, 1996). Coping with critical life events is helped by evaluating them as comprehensible, manageable and meaningful. By contrast, Guthrey (2015) found in his study on truth commission in the field of transitional justice that healing can be hampered by a lack

of understanding of the purpose and goals of the legal procedures and by witnesses' and victims' perception that their participation has little to no impact on the outcome. The elements of sense of coherence, comprehensibility, manageability and meaningfulness, seem to be reflected in the field of justice. With regard to investigative interviews, it is thought that it helps manage the stress that these interviews may cause if they make sense to the interviewees.

Some studies indicate that perceived fairness – particularly procedural fairness – can have a stabilizing effect on mental health in the context of the legal process (Wemmers, 2013), while others suggest that the outcome of the legal procedure (e.g. the trial) has a stronger impact (Orth & Maercker, 2004). However, to date there has not been sufficient examination of how perceived distributive and procedural fairness and outcome favourability affect mental health in the context of legal procedures, particularly in relation to investigative interviews (Köhnken, 2014). Instead, substantive research on the connection between perceived (procedural) fairness and health has been conducted with a focus on occupational health in organizations. Research on the positive link between organizational justice and physical and mental health is consistent (Greenberg, 2004; Moliner, Mart'inez-Tur, Peir'o, Ramos, & Cropanzano, 2005; Spell & Arnold, 2007). This positive link is also confirmed by a review of 12 longitudinal studies (Ndjabou'e, Brisson, & V'ezina, 2012) and by a longitudinal analysis of three military cohorts (Lang, Bliese, Lang, & Adler, 2011).

In investigative psychology research, various factors have been analysed that contribute to obtaining relevant and reliable information. Apart from more strategic, tactical and technical aspects, rapport-building and maintenance have been studied (Alison et al., 2013; Kebbell & Alison, 2008; Vallano & Schreiber Compo, 2015). Interestingly, these studies show a consensus between investigators and convicted offenders that a humane and empathic approach

is conducive to obtaining a confession and a reliable, comprehensive account of the facts (Holmberg & Christianson, 2002; Kebbell & Alison, 2008; Kebbell, Alison, Hurren, & Mazerolle, 2010; Westera, Kebbell, Milne, & Green, 2014). Building and maintaining rapport with the interviewee is considered to be of central importance by investigators of criminal offences, as well as by intelligence and anti-terrorism personnel (e.g. Alison et al., 2013; Redlich et al., 2014; Walsh & Bull, 2012). However, in an observational study of markers of empathy conducted by G.E. Oxburgh, Ost, and Cherryman (2012), no relationship was found between the number of empathic markers (e.g. opportunities, continuers and terminators) and the amount of investigation-relevant information (IRI) obtained in investigative interviews. In contrast, G.E. Oxburgh, Ost, Cherryman, and Morris (2014, 2015) found a significant impact on the amount of IRI obtained when empathy markers were used in conjunction with appropriate questioning techniques. This conflicting evidence on the role of empathy and rapportbuilding might be due to the lack of a common understanding of what constitutes empathy (G.E. Oxburgh et al., 2015) and, as a consequence, of how to formulate methodological questions that successfully capture relevant indicators of empathy in observation (G.E. Oxburgh et al., 2010). Whilst the impact of rapport and empathy on the outcome of investigations cannot be conclusively answered, it is a relevant factor that deserves more attention in future studies on investigative interviews – especially in a military context. As previously stated, a number of different definitions and operationalizations for rapport-building, rapport-maintenance and empathy are used in the body of research in this area. The associations between these factors and mental health capture different aspects of rapport and relationship: perceived fairness (particularly procedural and interpersonal fairness), an empathic and humane interviewing style and impartiality. It is assumed that these factors are relevant to mental health as well as to eliciting IRI from interviewees.



Given the above, when studying the relationship between investigative interviews and mental health, the following factors require systematic analysis: (i) perceived justice and outcome favourability; (ii) the effects of an empathic or humane interview style, social support, social recognition and impartiality; and (iii) a sense of coherence and meaningfulness in relation to the investigative process and investigative interviews. Future research is needed to examine whether or not these factors also contribute to obtaining IRI that assists in solving cases, specifically for military investigations.

### ***Perceived Justice and Outcome favourability***

The findings on procedural justice and rule adherence by Tyler, Callahan, and Frost (2007) demonstrate the relevance of procedural justice and outcome favourability in the military. Consistent with prior research on procedural justice, the authors found that representatives of US security forces are more inclined to identify with the organization's values and defer to its rules when they perceive that its authorities act in a fair way. This relationship was found to be stronger for the military than for the civilian police. The perceived fairness and outcome favourability of investigations might, therefore, generalize beyond the assessment of investigations to the assessment of the armed forces per se. It is posited that such a generalizing assessment of perceived justice could have a stronger impact on mental health than a differentiated or separated assessment of investigations, in line with the generalizing negative beliefs of depression (see Beck et al., 1987). The investigation of the relationship between perceived justice and outcome favourability in military investigations on the one hand and perceived justice in the armed forces per se on the other requires validated research instruments. Tyler et al. (2007) used a US-validated instrument for assessing the armed forces per se, which needs to be validated for a German language population. However, there is a lack of validated research instruments that can be used to

examine the unique features of procedural justice and outcome favourability in military investigations.

### ***The Effects of an Empathic and Humane Interviewing Style, Social Support and Impartiality***

#### ***Empathic and Humane Interviewing Style***

Holmberg and Christianson (2002), in their self-report study of convicted murderers and sex offenders, found a link between interviewing styles classified as dominant and humanitarian. One might question the transfer of findings on serious crime based on retrospective interviews to military investigations of acts that can include minor disciplinary matters; however, the relationship is also supported by the finding in an experimental design with students (Madsen & Holmberg, 2015). It can be posited that a humane interview style is even more important in a military context, given that it is not a separated period of interaction but rather is embedded in the context of the existing relationship with the supervisor and the potential future relationship as well. For example, the interviewer and the interviewee might have to continue working together in an interdependent relationship between superior and subordinate, and as fellow comrades.

#### ***Social Support and Unit Cohesion***

Numerous studies indicate the protective effects of social support and the harmful consequences of poor social support for maintaining physical and psychological health, and for recovering from mental health conditions (Barth et al., 2010; Ozbay et al., 2007; Uchino, 2006). Meta-analyses undertaken by both civilians and military personnel have revealed consistent main effects between a perceived lack of support and PTSD symptoms (Brewin, Andrews, & Valentine, 2000;

Ozer, Best, Lipsey, & Weiss, 2003; Xue et al., 2015). A military-specific form of social support is unit cohesion. Many military epidemiological studies in the UK and the US

have found support for the protective effect of unit cohesion for deployed personnel (Bailey et al., 2007; Du Preez, Sundin, Wessely, & Fear, 2012; Jones et al., 2012; Kanesarajah, Waller, Zheng, & Dobson, 2016; Zang et al., 2016). Based on anecdotal evidence, it can be posited that investigations into alleged disciplinary misconduct and criminal acts can have both harmful and beneficial impacts on unit cohesion. It can also be assumed that the factors outlined in this article – perceived fairness, impartiality and humane interview style – influence the impact that investigations have on unit cohesion.

### *Impartiality*

Impartiality is closely linked to the concept of procedural fairness and is occasionally understood as an element of procedural fairness (Blader & Tyler, 2003; Colquitt, 2001). Given the potential previous working relationship between investigator and interviewee in a military context, impartiality might be more difficult to establish due to existing friendships and enmities, as well as past experiences. At the same time, impartiality in military investigations might play a more important role than in criminal investigations since it has the potential to impact directly on future working relationships. Interdependent working relationships prior to investigations can be assumed, and even if an interview is conducted by military police or by a legal expert, the investigation is associated with a working relationship. These military-specific aspects should be accounted for when developing new research instruments to measure impartiality.

### *Sense of Coherence and Meaningfulness*

Sense of coherence is defined by Antonovsky (1987) as

a feeling of confidence that (a) the stimuli deriving from one's internal and external environments in the course of living are structured, predictable and explicable; (b) the resources are available to her/him to

meet the demands posed by these stimuli; and (c) these demands are challenges, worthy of investment and engagement. (Antonovsky, 1987, p. 276)

Meaningfulness – as a result of meaning-making – and sense of coherence are overlapping concepts (Park, 2010; Winger et al., 2016). Studies have found that sense of coherence and meaningfulness are positively related to stress reduction, quality of life and recovery when faced with traumatic events (Forstmeier et al., 2009; Winger et al., 2016). In a study of Swedish peacekeepers by Larsson et al. (2000), pre-deployment sense of coherence was found to correlate negatively with poor mental health after deployment. In respect to coping with specific military challenges such as deployment and stressful investigations, Park (2010) provides a useful differentiation between general and situational meaning; he believes that the concept of situational meaning can apply to the perceived meaningfulness of a military mission as well as to military investigations.

Having a subjectively meaningful mandate or task was found to be a motivating factor for US soldiers in the Vietnam War (Moskos, 1970), as well as for German soldiers deployed to the 22nd International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) contingent in Afghanistan (Pietsch, 2012). Thus, it is posited that coping with investigative interviews is facilitated by an understanding that they are necessary and that they make sense. If more was known about how comprehensible and meaningful service personnel perceive investigations to be, this information could be used to shape training and intervention measures directed at preventing dysfunctional stress reactions and their treatment. There is a need for the development of such a military-adapted self-report measure which includes aspects of meaningful investigations that are relevant to both investigator and interviewees.

### **Conclusion**

This article highlights the lack of research and subsequent knowledge surrounding military

discipline and investigative processes, and makes a case for the benefits of conducting future research in this area. Many mutual gains can be expected for both interviewer and interviewee in relation to investigation outcomes, in terms of a search-for-the-truth approach on the one hand and the mental health of the interviewee, unit cohesion and subjective legal security and safety on the other. On a more abstract level this means that a win-win situation for ensuring human rights and military readiness can be expected. The unique features of military investigations, with the complex differences between military systems on the one hand and the need for standardization on the other, require that research takes into account the standardization of military-specific research instruments and questionnaires as well as in-depth exploration using qualitative methodologies. Cross-culturally validated instruments can facilitate systematic comparisons between various armed forces on the impact that the investigative process has on military readiness, including mental health, unit cohesion, subjective legal security and the investigation outcome as measured by the amount of IRI obtained. With the scarcity of research in this important area, there is a need for new military-adapted research instruments which capture the following relevant factors: (i) perceived justice and outcome favourability; (ii) the effects of an empathic and humane interview style, unit cohesion and impartiality; and (iii) a sense of coherence and meaningfulness in relation to the investigative process and interviews.

A pilot study based on these objectives has been approved by the German Ministry of Defence and a first research grant supporting this pilot study has been granted. The main objective of this forthcoming study is to develop and validate these military-adapted research instruments.

#### Declaration of conflicts of interest

A. Buehler has declared no conflicts of interest.

G. E. Oxburgh has declared no conflicts of interest.

P. Zimmermann has declared no conflicts of interest.

G.-D. Willmund has declared no conflicts of interest.

U. Wesemann has declared no conflicts of interest.

#### Ethical approval

This article does not contain any studies with human participants or animals performed by any of the authors.

#### Note

1. Members of individual regiments or corps with responsibility for discipline within their own unit. Members of the regimental provost can be identified by the brassards they wear, which carry the letters "RP". They have no power of arrest over service personnel, nor are they a police organisation per se; their primary purpose is to enforce breaches of service discipline at a local unit level.

#### ORCID

Ulrich Wesemann  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-2537-2148>

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